

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** August 7, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Buffalo Coulee Conservation Easement

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final Action

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to purchase a perpetual conservation easement using Habitat Montana funds on 2,825 acres owned by Potter Brothers Farms in Valley County. The property, referred to as Buffalo Coulee, consists of three separate parcels located within 15 miles of one another, northwest of Glasgow. Buffalo Coulee consists of 2 miles of Milk River frontage and associated cottonwood bottoms, riparian habitats along two drainages that run through the property, and sagebrush grassland uplands, including primary antelope winter range. The cost to FWP to purchase this conservation easement would be \$450,000. FWP would also commit to cost sharing on grazing system infrastructure improvements and grass cover plantings, totaling approximately \$78,000.

The purchase of this conservation easement gives FWP the opportunity to work cooperatively with the Potter family to enhance and manage native habitats to benefit wildlife and agriculture; increase public recreation; protect healthy blocks of riparian and sagebrush habitats from habitat conversion; and support sustainable agriculture. The property provides the public with a number of recreational opportunities including: hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. Management activities would include development and implementation of a rest rotation grazing system, the reseedling and restoration of permanent cover, and permanent protection of high value habitats.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The EA was open to public comment Oct. 17—Nov. 9, 2012, during which a public hearing was held in Glasgow on Nov. 7, 2012 with nine people in attendance. A total of 16 comments were received, 15 of which were in favor of FWP acquiring the conservation easement. One comment was neutral and there were no comments opposed to this project.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Proposed Action: Purchase a conservation easement on 2,825 acres owned by Potter Brothers Farms. FWP would secure permanent public access to this land and develop a rest-rotation grazing system and riparian management to improve wildlife habitat.

No Action: FWP would forgo the opportunity to conserve and enhance the property with a willing private land partner. There would be no guarantee of public access to the property for recreation and land access would not be secured for the public.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends approval by the F&W Commission to proceed with the purchase of the Buffalo Coulee conservation easement from the Potter Brothers Farms.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve the purchase of the Buffalo Coulee conservation easement from Potter Brothers Farms.